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**Testimony for Appropriations Committee
HB5044 Subcommittee on Health
Governor's Proposed Budget Adjustments**

**By Jacqueline Longo, Program Coordinator, Youth Leadership
The Governor's Partnership to Protect Connecticut's Workforce
DBA The Governor's Prevention Partnership
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Good evening distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jacqueline Longo and I am here as the Program Coordinator for Youth Leadership at The Governor's Prevention Partnership. I am pleased and humbled to submit this testimony in support of resources for youth prevention. I am excited to be here today as a voice for Connecticut youth and for the prevention of underage drinking and the abuse of marijuana, prescription drugs, and other substances as these are growing issues in our state.

Alcohol stills remains the top two substances of abuse among kids across the state. This spring and fall, I surveyed 125 youth in focus groups confirming what research shows us – perception of harm is low. Kids think that underage drinking and smoking marijuana is no big deal.

These youth, when given the chance will open up, will talk and tell you exactly what is going on in their lives. They use drinking and smoking as a form of coping. One young man, a sophomore, told me that he can't stay home during his free time because he will think too much about everything. So he goes to his friend's house and he does whatever they are doing so he can be welcomed and escape his home life. One freshman girl from East Hartford told me that she felt proud of herself the first time she turned down drugs. However, she didn't turn the drugs down the second time or any time after that. Unfortunately due to her environment, using has become a normal part of her life.

The 2013 CT Youth Risk Behavior Survey shows us a sobering reality: in the last 30 days, 36.7% of youth have drank alcohol and 26% have smoked marijuana. Youth report to us that access to alcohol comes easily, with many getting it from friends or family members, even their own parents, in spite of strong social host laws in effect in our state.

Another significant threat to our kids comes in the form of prescription drug misuse and heroin abuse. Research shows us that many people using heroin start with prescription drugs, moving on to heroin after they become addicted to prescription pain relievers. This month's headlines from New London show us the stark reality of this problem – more than 20 overdoses, many of them young people.



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More than 11% of CT's youth report using a prescription drug for something other than its intended purpose and according to the National Institute of Drug Abuse, 45% of youth believe it is ok and not harmful to take prescription drugs when they are not prescribed to themselves. Over 50% of those who have abused prescription drugs got them from a friend or relative and 22% got them from a doctor and misused the prescription.

This year, The Governor's Prevention Partnership made great strides in supporting young people to make healthy decisions. We supported 25 Students Against Destructive Decisions Chapters reaching around 7,000 students around the state in working with middle and high schools to provide information about the effects of alcohol and substance abuse and the dangers of driving under the influence. With support from the Department of Transportation and DMHAS, we launched E3: Encourage, Empower, Engage, an alcohol and substance abuse prevention program run by kids for kids in 6 schools and communities reaching about 2,000 students.

One sophomore aged girl told me during one focus group "I wish I had stricter parents like some of these other kids. Because at least they would know where I am and what I am doing. This would keep me out of trouble. Instead I can do just about anything and no one says anything to me."

The Partnership has launched a parents webinar series, open to all parents and youth providers to learn more about how to prevent underage drinking, prescription drug abuse, marijuana, and bullying as these issues are so prevalent in the lives of youth and parents are the first line of defense to prevent these behaviors from occurring. We provide tips and tools, along with the new findings so our Connecticut parents are up to date on all the latest information. Prevention is a cost effective tool for our state. Effective prevention strategies across the lifespan means less use of expensive treatment and intervention services later in life. SAMHSA estimates that for every \$1 spent on prevention programs for addictions and mental illness, there is a \$2 to \$10 savings in health costs, criminal and juvenile justice costs, educational costs, and lost productivity.

On behalf of Connecticut youth we thank you for your past support of our prevention work in all areas and ask you for your continued investment in prevention as underage drinking is still an issue and other drugs are making their way into the lives of youth.

Thank you,

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